SPOTLIGHT

LOUISIANA

Population, 1984 (est.): 4,462,000
Births per 1,000 pop. (1983): 18.6
Deaths per 1,000 pop. (1983): 8.2
Land area: 47,800 sq. miles
Persons per square mile (1980): 94.5
Children ever born to 1,000 women aged 25-44 (1980): 2,242
Percent of population aged 65 and over (1983): 9.6
Percent of population aged 18 and under (1983): 30.6
Percent born in Louisiana now residing there (1980): 78.1

by Edward O'Boyle

The Louisiana economy is a special blending of the new and the old, the colorful and the dynamic: oil rigs and cotton gins, sugar cane and paper mills, petrochemicals and fur trapping. Of late, the image builders have tagged Louisiana the "Dream State."

Most fundamentally, however, Louisiana is 4,462,000 Louisianians, according to Census Bureau estimates for 1984. The state's population doubled over the 55-year period beginning in 1930, from 2.102 million to 4.206 million. In 1980, some 29 percent of the population was black. In 1830, the proportion of black residents was twice as high. While many are aware of Louisiana's 18th century French and Spanish settlers, roughly three thousand years before the flags of France and Spain were planted in the soil, Indians were living on the Gulf coast and in the Mississippi River basin.

In 1980, the "typical" Louisianian was 27.4 years old, a native of the state, and lived with two to three other family members. At home, approximately 10 percent of Louisianians 5 years of age and older spoke a language other than English. Overwhelmingly, and not surprisingly, that second language was French. Average family income was $21,454 in 1980. Nearly one of every five families lived below the poverty level. The poverty rate for children under age 6 was one of every four.

Over the past decade or more much has been made of the migration from the Frost Belt to the Sun Belt. Almost 325,000 persons migrated to and stayed in Louisiana from 1975 to 1980. Sixty-one percent of these reported living elsewhere in the South in 1975; only 81,000 immigrants came from the Northeast and North Central U.S. During the same period, about 278,000 persons moved away, mostly to other Southern states, notably Texas. Ninety percent of Louisiana residents in 1980 were living in the state in 1975.

Louisiana ranked 19th in total population among the 50 states in 1980. At the same time, it ranked third in the number of persons born in Vietnam, exceeded only by the more populous California and Texas. More than 90 percent of Louisiana's Vietnamese natives immigrated during the 1975-1980 period.

In terms of the number of persons employed, wholesale-retail trade and professional and related services were the two major industry groups in Louisiana in 1980. The third and fourth major groups were manufacturing and construction. While Louisiana's oil and gas industry has figured prominently in its development, the mining sector (which includes oil and gas extraction) accounted for only about 5 percent of the state's employment.

More persons were employed in technical, sales, and administrative support occupations than any other group. The second largest group was managerial and professional specialty occupations. Together, these two groups accounted for one-half of all employed persons in Louisiana.

At the time of the 1980 Census, the rate of unemployment among blacks was more than twice the rate for whites. White per capita income in 1979 was $7,641. For blacks, the figure was $3,628. Among persons receiving income in 1979, the median for white males was $13,724. For black males the median was 50 percent lower and for white females it was more than 60 percent lower. Among black females, the median was $3,302 or only 25 percent of the white-male standard.

Among the population 25 years and older, about 55-60 percent were high school graduates in 1980. The proportion varied greatly by race and by urban/rural residence. For whites in central cities the rate was 72.2 percent, more than twice that of rural blacks.

The state's future depends critically on how well it manages its natural resources, and in particular, how it addresses the need to develop its human resources as oil and gas reserves become depleted. At present, the state's higher education is vocationally oriented, but public debate on the future might be summed up by the question: Should education continue to follow economic development or should development follow education? The answer to that question may well decide whether future generations of young Louisianians realize their life dreams in the Dream State or somewhere else. □

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Keiki Ozaki

Jackson Square in New Orleans — part of the Louisiana story.